

2000

## Curricular Report No. 1999-2000-6 from the Graduate Council to the Faculty Senate

University of Rhode Island Faculty Senate

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UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND  
FACULTY SENATE

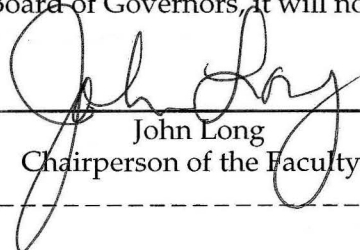
Serial Number #99-00--20

TO: President Robert L. Carothers

FROM: Chairperson of the Faculty Senate

1. The attached BILL, titled University College and General Education Committee  
Report #99-00-3  
is forwarded for your consideration.
2. The original and two copies for your use are included.
3. This BILL was adopted by vote of the Faculty Senate on March 23, 2000.
4. After considering this bill, will you please indicate your approval or disapproval. Return the original or forward it to the Board of Governors, completing the appropriate endorsement below.
5. In accordance with Section 10, paragraph 4 of the Senate's By-Laws, this bill will become effective April 13, 2000 three weeks after Senate approval, unless: (1) specific dates for implementation are written into the bill; (2) you return it disapproved; (3) you forward it to the Board of Governors for their approval; or (4) the University Faculty petitions for a referendum. If the bill is forwarded to the Board of Governors, it will not become effective until approved by the Board.

March 24, 2000  
(date)

  
John Long  
Chairperson of the Faculty Senate

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ENDORSEMENT

TO: Chairperson of the Faculty Senate

FROM: President of the University

Returned.

- a. Approved ☒
- b. Approved subject to final approval by Board of Governors ☐
- c. Disapproved ☐

3/31/00  
(date)

  
President

**UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND**  
**Kingston, Rhode Island**  
**FACULTY SENATE**

**UNIVERSITY COLLEGE AND GENERAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE**  
**REPORT #99-00-3**  
**March 6, 2000**

At their meetings of February 3 and March 6, 2000 The University College and General Education Committee considered the existing General Education Program. In addition course approval, the committee discussed efforts over the past four years to review aspects of URI 101 and incorporate what has been learned into the freshman seminar. Following is the UCGE Committee's recommendation for the existing program and an informational report by Dean Jayne Richmond on successive reviews and modifications in the delivery of URI 101.

**SECTION I - Requires Faculty Senate Confirmation**

**Current General Education Program**

The UCGE Committee recommends approval of the following change to the existing general education program:

That PHL 215, Science and Inquiry, be added to the Letters (L) area of the General Education Program.

\* \* \* \* \*

**SECTION II - Informational Report**

**Summary of Evaluation of URI 101**

**Finding what works. Changing what doesn't. Planning the future.**

This brief report summarizes five years of evaluation activities directed at examining the effectiveness of URI 101, validating its strengths and pointing out problems calling for change. The emphasis of this summary is on efforts to learn about the Freshman Seminar and make improvements based upon what was learned.

Specific reports detailing the annual evaluation results are available for review in University College and may be obtained from Dean Jayne Richmond. A complete report on the Fall 1999 Review of URI 101 is also available in the Faculty Senate Office.

## **CHALLENGES IN THE TRANSITION TO COLLEGE**

The academic, social, emotional and physical adjustments to college life are easily mastered by some, while for others these adjustments may prove very stressful and unsatisfactory. According to Tinto (1993) the positive results of freshman transition courses and integrated first year programs show they are important tools that support student adjustment and persistence in college. One particularly powerful model of the freshman transition course is the learning community in which students come together around some form of unifying experience, theme, major or living arrangement that seeks to establish linkages between course content for a cohort of students. Research regarding learning communities has shown that students who participate in them have stronger connections to each other, to the faculty, and to the institution.

### **A. Summary of Past Evaluations (1995-1998)**

#### **1995-1996**

In the Fall 1995 semester, the University of Rhode Island began offering a one-credit course, URI 101: Traditions and Transformations, required of all freshmen students as of Fall 1996. Course goals include helping students to: 1) adjust to life at URI, 2) become familiar with university resources, 3) plan educational goals, 4) learn about extracurricular activities, 5) improve academic skills, and 6) understand URI community values.

The first two years) incorporated quantitative evaluations which asked students, faculty and mentors to rate the helpfulness of the course in meeting the above goals, and to rate the importance of each of these goals in helping students to succeed in college. Results were consistent, defining the success of the course to be primarily in introducing students to the resources of the university, learning about extracurricular activities, and helping to adjust to URI. The course was consistently rated as less helpful for improving academic skills and planning educational goals.

#### **Fall 1997**

For the Fall 1997 term, we developed as a pilot, six learning communities to assess the effectiveness of this model in addressing the seeming lack of academic integration for students in the URI 101 courses. A cohort of 25 students was concurrently registered in the cluster of three courses, including their URI 101 course. Of the 6 course goals, learning community students attributed significantly more helpfulness in terms of planning educational goals and in improving academic survival skills than did their non-learning community counterparts. Faculty in the learning communities said their students participated more in class, and more readily formed bonds with each other around their academic experiences. Quantitative ratings of both Student/Peer

Relationships and Student/Faculty Relationships were significantly better for learning community students than non-learning community students as well.

### **Fall 1998**

Evaluations this year utilized pre- and post-test measures to assess changes in students' attitude (sense of confidence in their academic and social skill development), behavior (getting involved, time spent studying) and knowledge (how to use university resources, where to go to get help) from before and after completing URI 101.

In terms of academic survival skills, students reported increased confidence after completing URI 101 in meeting with their advisor, studying for tests, asking librarians for help, understanding the kind of reading required in college, and finding help when they need it.

Confidence increased concerning handling conflict issues with roommates, handling disagreements with friends and dealing with situations of academic integrity. Additionally, students reported that URI 101 helped in becoming familiar with university resources, learning about extracurricular activities, understanding URI community values, connecting to URI as a learning community, improving academic survival skills, and planning educational goals.

### **B. Fall 1999 Qualitative Focus**

While past quantitative measures of URI 101 had been useful in demonstrating areas of strength and weakness in achieving course goals, they did not adequately illustrate factors important to student adjustment and social and academic integration. We wanted to know what students valued in their academic experience and what they believed would make a difference in helping them to make a successful transition to college. Therefore, in the Fall 1999, we developed twenty learning communities and evaluated their effectiveness using focus groups as a qualitative methodology.

Twelve learning community sections and twelve non-learning community sections participated in focus groups conducted during the last week of the 6-week mini-semester model of the course. Questions included: changes and challenges faced during the semester; stressors in the college environment; peer relationships; study groups; experiences with faculty; participation in campus activity; satisfaction with the university; and intention to persist.

For greater detail about methodology and findings, see the complete report for Fall 1999.

### **Finding highlights**

The overall findings were positive for the value of learning communities, with several consistent themes in the students' focus group comments. Students in learning communities reported that having at least one small class, preferably

a skill-based class made the impact of this arrangement much more significant. Those in two large classes along with URI 101 did not believe that the learning community arrangement made a difference for them, as they did not connect with their peers in more significant ways than did the URI 101 students not in learning communities.

Students enrolled in the learning communities that included a second small class compared to students in stand alone sections showed an 18 to 1 ratio in intent to persist, and more than 95% said they would enroll again in a learning community and recommend it to friend, as they believed it helped with their transition to college.

Learning community students said they were:

- Better able to form new friendships, in and out of class
- Less overwhelmed with academic expectations
- Better able to deal with large classes
- More comfortable with and more able to
- raise hand in class
- give opinion
- form study groups

These students also expressed

- more desire to learn together
- more positive perceptions of faculty
- more attachment to URI – felt they belonged
- greater satisfaction with residence life, roommates, services
- greater resilience and contentment

### **ADDRESSING CONTINUING CONCERNS – LINKING TO COURSE GOALS**

Five years of course evaluation has provided a clearer picture of where we need to focus our efforts. Of grave concern has been the seeming lack of consistency across sections, with some instructors choosing to de-emphasize issues of preparing for academic advising, helping with planning educational goals, and making the course more active, or “hands-on” (all of which have been identified by students as important needs). To help students to better plan their educational goals and think about co-curricular involvement, we are moving increasingly to pre-scheduling presentations by campus service providers such as Academic Advising, Career Services, the Office of International Education, and the office of Internships and Experiential Education. This is further enhanced by giving instructors organized syllabi, with opportunities to talk about their discipline or themes for the course. Presentations by the Learning Assistance Center and the library will help students to improve their academic skills. By participating in community service, hearing about opportunities for involvement, and learning about the issues of health and safety, students will better understand community values, a final goal of the course.

## CONCLUSION

Since the first year is when persistence is at its most fragile, it is important that institutions build strong foundations during this time that foster connections with students. Interventions such as the 101 freshman course, integrated within learning communities, provide a foundation that encourages faculty/student and student/student partnerships, while creating powerful learning environments. We now have modest evidence to suggest that retention rates are improving at URI, in contrast to national norms, and although it is impossible to prove, we hope that URI 101 played a small role in this." Given the positive findings regarding the learning community model with URI 101, it is our intention to provide this option to as many new students as possible for Fall 2000. Having evaluated the specific aspects of successful learning communities that make use of URI 101, we will focus our attention on tying these course clusters together with skills courses such as writing 101 and communication 101 and 103, as well as other appropriate general education course options. The impact of this model on student adjustment and persistence will continue to be assessed.

Members of the UCGE Committee for Spring 2000:

Arts and Sciences: Sandra Ketrow, COM

Arts and Sciences: John Stevenson, PSY, Interim Chair

Arts and Sciences: Carole Miller, ECN

Arts and Sciences: Arts and Sciences: Judith Swift, THE

Business Administration: Clay Sink, MGT

Engineering: Leland Jackson, ELE

Human Science and Services: Robert Laird, HDF

Nursing: Deborah Godfrey-Brown

Pharmacy, Sara Rosenbaum, APS

The Environment and Life Sciences: Anthony Mallilo, FAVS

University Library: Robin Devin

Provost's Representative: Blair Lord, Vice Provost

CCE: Edmund Ferszt, Associate Dean

Student Development Representative: Theodora Zubrinski

Dean of University College: Jayne Richmond

Faculty Senate Coordinator: Sheila Black Grubman